

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JEFF SESSIONS
SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
“HEALTHY MARRIAGE: WHAT IS IT AND WHY SHOULD WE PROMOTE IT?”
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Good afternoon. Marriage is unquestionably one of the fundamental institutions in our society. There was a time when it would have been difficult to imagine that such a pillar of civilization could be threatened. Yet, today some say marriage is “out-dated” and unimportant. We hear this from certain academics, the popular media, the secular left, and the issue is driven home with emphasis when high courts declare that the traditional definition of marriage is unconstitutional.

I believe that it is important that we carefully examine the institution of marriage. Let me begin by emphasizing that while discussing the value of marriage to individuals and to society, I do not mean to disparage single parent families in any way. Certainly, there is no doubt that many, many children who grow up in single parent households develop quite well. However, we are here to discuss what social science says, or what the numbers say. We want to determine what is the optimal arrangement for families.

While looking at marriage, we need to answer three fundamental questions. First, is marriage good for individuals and for society? Second, if marriage is good for individuals and for society, should government be involved in supporting and promoting it? And finally, if government is involved, can it make a positive difference?

I believe that after listening to our distinguished witnesses this afternoon, we will determine that the answer to each of these questions is yes. First, the evidence will show that marriage is a social good. Marriage certainly contributes to the

physical, emotional, and economic health of men, women, and children, and is therefore beneficial to the country as a whole. A plethora of social science evidence demonstrates that children do best when they grow up with both married biological parents.

The answer to the second question is also yes – government should be involved in supporting and promoting marriage. The government frequently advances policies to promote the general welfare. For example, we provide incentives for home ownership because we know that communities with high levels of home ownership are safer, more stable, and families are stronger. There are also tax breaks for charitable giving; grants, loans, and tax breaks for educational advancement; and incentives for preventative health care. All of these are examples of the government supporting and promoting a social good.

Additionally, government involvement can be justified because divorce and unwed childbearing create substantial public costs born by the tax payers. When both adults and children are members of families led by a married man and woman, they suffer from lower rates of crime, drug abuse, education failure, chronic illness, child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, and other social problems. These families do not require as many programs covered by tax dollars, such as: welfare expenditures, remedial and special-education expenses, day-care subsidies, child-support collection costs, administrative costs, and social program costs. Therefore, government has a very real interest in promoting marriage.

Finally, I would answer the third question by arguing that government can make a very real difference by promoting and supporting marriage. Today we will hear about a recent study which demonstrates that policies supporting marriage in

communities have led to a marked decrease in the number of divorces in those communities. We are also going to hear about the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, an innovative program to promote and support marriage that is serving as a model to other states and communities.

I do not believe that we have to continue down the same path that Europe is currently racing down. It is not inevitable that we will have sixty percent of our first-born children born to unmarried parents as they are in Denmark. We do not have to allow other countries or our own activist courts to tell us that traditional marriage is “out-dated.” In fact, we will serve our nation and the world if we study the issue objectively and take steps to reverse the trends and prove that the marriage of one man and one woman is and will always be the most ideal framework for family. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today.